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Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PRAGUE 02112 210958Z

14
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-10

SAJ-01 SAM-01 /071 W
---------- 013048
P R 201520Z AUG 75
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8674
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
USMISSION BERLIN
AMEMBASSY VIENNA
AMCONSUL ZURICH
AMCONSUL MUNICH

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 2112

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: CGEN, SREF, PFOR, PINS, CZ, GW, GE, AU (MEEKER, BARRY)
SUBJECT: ALLEGED AMCIT FLIES HELICOPTER TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA
TO RESCUE THREE EAST GERMAN REFUGEES
REF: MUNICH 1733

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: ON AUGUST 19 MFA DELIVERED MODERATELY
STRONG PROTEST TO FRG CHARGE AND MADE A LOW-KEY APPROACH
TO THE AUSTRIAN AMBASSADOR OVER THE HELICOPTER INCIDENT.
CZECHOSLOVAK PRESS RESPONSE TO THE INCIDENT, WHILE SERIOUS
IN TONE, WAS DELAYED AND RESTRAINED WITH NO MENTION MADE OF
THE NATIONALITY OF THE PILOT. PERHAPS GOC WOULD HAVE PREFERRED
TO HAVE KEPT THE WHOLE INCIDENT QUIET, BUT HAD TO REACT TO THE
PROMINENT TREATMENT GIVEN BY WESTERN MEDIA. END OF SUMMARY.

2. FRG CHARGE, COUNT VON FINCKENSTEIN, INFORMED CHARGE
AUG 20 OF PROTEST MADE TO HIM LATE AFTERNOON AUG 19 BY DEPUTY
FOREIGN MINISTER SPACIL. FINCKENSTEIN CHARACTERIZED PROTEST AS
BEING DONE IN "AN ACCEPTABLE WAY," AND PROBABLY INEVITABLE IN VIEW
OF THE IMMENSE PRESS ATTENTION TO THE CASE IN WESTERN EUROPE WHICH
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PAGE 02 PRAGUE 02112 210958Z

FOCUSED ATTENTION ON VIOLATION OF CZECHOSLOVAK BORDERS. SPACIL

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006

MADE SHORT, "FAIRLY BALANCED" VERBAL STATEMENT WHOSE MAIN POINTS WERE: (A) VERY REGRETTABLE EVENT HAD TAKEN PLACE: ON AUG 15 AND 17 CZECHOSLOVAK AIRSPACE HAD BEEN VIOLATED TWICE BY HELICOPTERS WITHOUT NATIONAL MARKINGS, WITH AIM OF KIDNAPPING CITIZENS OF GDR FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA. (B) FLIGHTS STARTED FROM TERRITORY OF FRG. (C) IN SECOND INCIDENT, "SHOOTING TOOK PLACE."
(D) GOC DISQUIETED BY VIOLATION OF BORDER IN SUCH FLAGRANT WAY. (E) CHARGE WAS ASKED TO TRANSMIT VERY STRONG PROTEST OF GOC TO BONN. SUCH INCIDENTS DID NOT HELP DEVELOPMENT OF BETTER RELATIONS. (F) GOC PRESENTED THIS IN SUCH AN URGENT MANNER IN ORDER TO SHOW HOW CONCERNED GOC WAS ABOUT INCIDENTS. GOC INVESTIGTION NOT YET OVER, GOC RESERVED RIGHT TO TAKE CASE UP AGAIN WHEN INVESTIGATION FINISHED.

3. FRG CHARGE SAID HE REPLIED TO SPACIL THAT HE COULD NOT COMMENT OFFICIALLY SINCE HE WAS NOT INFORMED OF THE INCIDENTS, AND ALL HE KNEW WAS WHAT HE HAD HEARD ON WESTERN RADIO BROADCASTS. HE HAD NO INSTRUCTIONS FROM HIS GOVERNMENT, BUT IN HIS PERSONAL OPINION, THIS WAS A VERY SINGULAR CASE BASED ON PRIVATE INITITATIVE AND SHOULD BE VIEWED IN THAT LIGHT. FRG CHARGE ADDED THAT FRG ORGANS WERE ALSO INVESTIGATION CASE IN ORDER TO SHED ANY POSSIBLE LIGHT ON IT.

4. ALSO ON AUGUST 19, SPACIL CALLED IN AUSTRIAN AMBASSADOR PASCH. THE AUSTRIANS WERE PLEASED AT THE LOW-KEY CZECHOSLOVAK APPROACH AND HAVE TOLD US THEY COULD NOT EVEN CHARACTERIZE IT AS A "PROTEST." RATHER SPACIL TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT SUCH INCIDENTS SHOULD NOT HAPPEN, AND REQUESTED AN IMMEDIATE MEETING OF CZECHOSLOVAK/AUSTRIAN BORDER COMMISSION. AUSTRIANS AGREE THIS IS PROPER FORUM FOR THE MATTER AND ARE HAPPY THAT IT IS OUT OF DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS.

5. GERMAN CHARGE HAD DISCUSSED MATTER AUG 20 WITH AUSTRIAN AMB PASCH, AND THEY HAD BOTH AGREED THAT SO FAR AT LEAST GOC WAS TRYING NOT TO OVERDO THEIR PROTEST OF THE MATTER. IT WAS NOTEWORTHY, GERMAN CHARGE FELT, THAT SPACIL DID NOT USE WORD "PROTEST" WITH AUSTRIAN AMB; HE WONDERED IF CZECHS WERE NOT TRYING TO DRIVE WEDGE BETWEEN GERMANS AND AUSTRIANS IN THE CASE. IN ANY EVENT, GERMAN CHARGE FELT THAT CASE AROSE IN SUCH CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 PRAGUE 02112 210958Z

DRAMATIC WAY THAT GOC WAS OBLIGED TO MAKE SOME PROTEST, AND THEY WERE SO FAR DOING SO IN A TOLERABLE MANNER.

6. PRESS: A FRONT-PAGE ARTICLE IN THE AUGUST 20 RUDE PRAVO, SERIOUS BUT RESTRAINED IN TONE, WAS FIRST APPEARANCE OF INCIDENT IN THE PRESS. THE ARTICLE CLAIMED THAT TWO INCURSIONS TOOK PLACE AT A DEPTH OF SEVERAL KILOMETERS. THE FIRST WAS ON AUGUST 15 WHEN THE HELICOPTER TOOK ON BOARD FOUR PERSONS AND THE SECOND

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006

OCCURRED ON AUGUST 17, AT SAME SPOT, WHEN TWO PERSONS WERE APPREHENDED. THE ARTICLE REPORTED THAT THE PILOT COVERED HIS DEPARTURE BY SHOOTING WHICH WAS THEN RETURNED BY THE CZECH GUARD. THE ARTICLE THEN EXPRESSED REGRET THAT THIS ACTION OF "INTERNATIONAL BANDITRY" CAME AT A TIME WHEN WORLD WAS STILL UNDER A FAVORABLE IMPRESSION FROM THE HELSINKI CONFERENCE. ARTICLE STATED THAT ANSWER MUST BE FOUND TO QUESTION OF WHO ALLOWS AND SUPPORTS SUCH ACTIONS WHICH VIOLATE PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE. FINALLY IT DISMISSED THE VIEW THAT THE INCIDENT WAS A PURELY PRIVATE AFFAIR ABOUT WHICH FRG HAS NO INFORMATION AND WHICH IT HAS NO MEANS TO PREVENT. NO MENTION WAS MADE OF NATIONALITY OF PILOT OR OF ANYONE ELSE CONNECTED WITH THE INCIDENT.

7. COMMENT: WE ARE NOT SURE WHY GOC HAS NOT INVOLVED US IN THIS MATTER SO FAR. ONE POSSIBILITY IS THAT IMMEDIATE GROUND FOR PORTEST WAS VIOLATION OF AIRSPACE, ON WHICH GERMANS AND AUSTRIANS WERE MORE ACCUSABLE THAN WE. IF SO, IT MAY BE THAT AS INVESTIGATION PROCEEDS, CZECHS WILL MAKE FURTHER PRO-TESTS AND INCLUDE US IN NEXT ROUND. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT THEY ARE NOT SURE OF CITIZENSHIP OF PILOT, AND THEREFORE ARE HOLDING BACK FROM BLASTING US UNTIL THEY ARE PERSUADED HE IS U.S. CITIZEN. ONLY OTHER POSSIBILITY WE CAN PERCEIVE RIGHT NOW IS THAT THE CZECHS ARE TREATING US SOMEWHAT MORE CAREFULLY AT THE MOMENT THAN THEY ARE THE GERMANS AND AUSTRIANS, BUT WE ARE NOT PLACING ANY BETS ON THAT THESIS UNTIL IT HAS SOME CONFIRMA-TION. FINALLY, THE SLOWNESS OF THE MEDIA TO REACT AND THE RELATIVLY RESTRAINED RESPONSES BOTH IN THE PRESS AND IN DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS LEAD US TO BELIEVE GOC WOULD HAVE PREFERRED TO HAVE KEPT THE WHOLE INCIDENT QUIET, BUT HAD TO REACT TO PROMINENT TREATMENT IN THE WEST.
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